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ABSTRACT

The rationale, background, and nature of family enrichment programs is explained. These structured, skill training approaches for couples and families consist of six lessons with four to six exercises per lesson. They are extremely structured to the point that instructions to trainers are given verbatim. Trainers can modify these instructions and sequences of exercises and lessons to meet the needs of a particular couple or family. The 2 training manuals contain 27 programs each. One manual classifies programs according to structural characteristics (simple-complex; general-specific; rational-experiential). The second manual classifies programs according to a developmental life-cycle perspective, starting from courtship and going on to various life cycle stress points and ending with retirement and death. Preventive, didactic, quasi-therapeutic, and research implications are discussed from the viewpoints of manpower delivery and costs. (Author)

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An Attempt at Prevention: Marriage and Family Enrichment Programs

Mental health needs of the present and of the future indicate that therapy and therapeutic approaches, whether with individual, groups, or families, cannot but deal with a small percentage of the population in need of some kind of intervention that will allow a smoother degree of coping with items of today's living. In an attempt to fill this vacuum, the last decade has seen the upsurge of what have been called in various ways, structured, interpersonal, social skills training programs. Among the various programs that have come to the fore, one could include the Minnesota Couples Communication, Relationship Enhancement, Fair Fighting, Marriage Encounter, Parent Effectiveness Training, Family Mediation, Family Clusters, etc. All of these programs fill a void left by therapeutic techniques. Many families need help. However, they are not disturbed or dysfunctional enough to require therapy. Thus, these skills training programs for couples and families are for those who: (a) do not need nor require prolonged treatment; (b) want a preset, preselected topic that will fill some of their needs; (c) for a definite number of sessions, and (d) for a clear fee with no surprises. For every couple and family in therapy there are at least 3 to 5 couples and families that could profit by such skill training. After all, who trained us to be family members? We are trained in practically everything else but we assume that all of us know how to negotiate, how to express our feelings, how to listen, how to contract, how to disagree without put-down, etc.

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Because of these needs, Marriage and Family Enrichment Programs were developed in the Family Study Center of the Psychology Department at Georgia State University. This is one of the few programs in the country that prepares leaders in what should be considered as a new field of "family psychology". As part of their training, graduate

students learn to conduct enrichment programs for couples and families mostly drawn from the undergraduate population.

The Nature of Enrichment Programs

Programmed Instruction: One enthusiastic programmed instruction expert once boasted "Give me anything worthy of notice and I'll reduce it to programmed instruction". In a certain sense this statement is true. Any notion, idea, concept, and theory can be broken down into small steps and set into a sequential order that will allow learning through progressive and gradual steps from the simplest idea to the most complex. This practice has been the technological basis of Enrichment Programs. Start asking questions to a couple or to a family, and let them answer the best they know how, push them somewhat if they can, and then go on to the next question. This gradual sequence is present within the questions of one lesson and among lessons (usually 6) of a specific program. As a result of this practice, an extremely large number of programs for couples and families have been written and published, ranging all the way from expecting the first child to adolescence, marriage, divorce and death. A third manual is now in preparation.

The two available manuals of Enrichment contain 27 programs each for a total of hundreds of lessons and the capacity to meet almost any need faced by most couples and families. If there is a specific need for a specific program that is not available, it can be written!

Thus, each lesson gives the trainer(s) verbatum instructions on how to ask a particular question and what to do whenever inevitable but predictable issues come up during the course of enrichment. A written contract describing the program is given to a couple or family and is signed to safeguard the couple and family's confidentiality, and meet standards of research set for human subjects. Each couple or family is evaluated objectively pre- and post-enrichment. A follow-up session after post-testing is given to assess the couple or family's reactions, give them feedback,

and discuss with them what works well for them and what they need to work on. Where do they want to go from what they have learned?

After the initial interview and testing, each couple or family is given two or three programs that seem to meet their needs. They choose from those submitted to them. If, during enrichment, a given program does not seem to do the job, another program is substituted for it.

To give an idea of the versatility of this approach, we are going to outline programs that are available in each manual. In the first (1975) the following programs are available:

A. Confronting change
B. Problem-solving in courtship and marriage
C. Premarital problem-solving
D. Adolescent sexual awareness
E. Clarification of sexual attitudes
F. Sexual fulfillment for couples
G. Cohabitation
H. Assertiveness
I. Equality
J. Reciprocity
K. Negotiation
L. Conflict resolution
M. Working through
N. Expecting couples
O. Parental assertiveness
P. Parental effectiveness
Q Problem-solving
R. Communication
S. Three-generational families

T. The meaning of adolescence

U. Between parents and teenagers

V. Separating teenagers from their parents

W. Single-parent families

X. Mixed groups of divorcees

Y. Widows and Widowers

Z. Death and dying

The list of programs in the other (1978) manual is as follows:

I. Simple

A. Affective

B. Cognitive attitudinal

C. Financial problems

D. Democratic living

E. Behavioral intervention

II. Intermediate

F. General-Eclectic

G. Value clarification

H. Helpfulness

I. Excessive attitudes

III. Advanced Affective

J. Introductory-Experiential

K. Experiential

L. Experiential-Advanced

M. Experiential-Cognitive

N. Cognitive-Experiential

IV. Advanced-Cognitive

O. Practical

P. Interactional

Q. Familial dysfunctions

R. Organizational

S. Transactional

V. Special Purpose

T. Differentiation through photography

U. Drugs and the family

V. Adoption

W. Physical handicap (in children)

X. Mental retardation (in children)

Y. Families of alcoholics

Z. Pathogenic triangles

As the reader can note, one manual follows developmental sequences while the other follows structural dimensions. Both dimensions need to be considered in selecting a particular program for each family.

On the basis of ten years' experience with these programs and work with hundreds of couples and families, it is clear that these programs fulfill a variety of functions:

First and foremost, these programs fulfill a preventive function, i.e., help prevent further breakdown and deterioration in families that may eventually have led to professional attention. In this respect, these programs fulfill a quasi-therapeutic function. They can be, should be, and are used in addition to, parallel with, or prior to treatment, making treatment easier, shorter, and perhaps more economical.

A second function for these programs is instructional. They help train future family leaders in a preventive rather than therapeutic modality that will be important to their future professional development and impact.

A third function fulfilled by these programs is diagnostic. A famous psychologist, Urise Broffenbreuner once said: "If you want to know how a system works, try to change it". In the course of entering into a family through enrichment, a great

deal is learned about that system that can be then used to make recommendations for future interventions or no interventions.

A fourth and very important function is research. By evaluating each couple or family on a pre-post-enrichment basis, we can assess any short-term changes that may take place as a result of enrichment. A follow-up of long-term enrichment effects indicates that at least 80% of the couples and families sampled are very satisfied with the enrichment experience.

Conclusion

Enrichment programs, as one of the many social skills training programs available today in Atlanta, can add to an improvement of mental health in the community within a preventive modality that will need to be given greater attention in the future.

References relating to this article can be obtained on request from the author.

PREVENTION AND TRAINING FOR FAMILY LIFE.[+]

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The purpose of this testimony is to stress the need for (a) broad, preventive approaches to family life, and (b) training of new professionals who will be able to institute these preventive approaches rather than therapeutic approaches.

We license plumbers, car drivers, cosmetologists, and all sorts of servicemen including, in some states, auto-mechanics. We train and give degrees in hundreds and perhaps thousands of specialties. Yet, the most responsible jobs on earth require no training and no license. We automatically assume and accept the fact that we can match, marry, and dispatch without any standards or criteria to check on our qualifications to become partners and parents. No wonder we now see the outcome of this process. To be a partner and a parent in this day and age takes more than an able body. It takes preparation, responsibility, and commitment. It takes a whole lot of factors that go beyond social class and intellectual level. It was much easier for me to get the Ph.D. degree and pass two Boards than to become a responsible partner and an effective parent.

We need to question the freedom we have allowed ourselves in view of divorce, illegitimacy, abuse, murder and mayhem that take place in family life. The Catholic Church is doing something in

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[+]Testimony to be delivered at the hearing for the Georgia White House Conference for the Family, Gainesville, GA, January 29, 1980.

controlling the whole process of courtship and marriage, requiring youngsters to wait and learn something about themselves before allowing the marriage to take place (Robinson, 1979).

Decisions of this kind are political decisions that are well beyond the control of many of us. What can we do to improve the quality of family life? We can do a lot. We have developed a technology to improve family life but we need (a) delivery systems, (b) referral systems, (c) incentive systems. What are the incentives that will make couples and families want to be trained and to become better equipped with the sresses and strains of family life?

Where is this training to take place? Who is going to train trainers? Who are going to be family life trainers? What kind of training should we make available and which is more effective? These and a lot more questions need answers.

The rest of this testimony will be delivered in outline form.

A. Lack of criteria for marriage and parenthood.
   1. License based on physical rather than emotional and/or intellectual criteria.
   2. Should anybody who wants to get married be allowed to procreate irresponsibly?
   3. If total freedom is given, how can the licensure and abuse be controlled?

B. Controls are not enough --- nor the answers.
   1. Selection criteria for marriage and parenthood would be very difficult to agree upon and to implement.
   2. Once guidelines or controls are set it would be difficult to enforce them.

C. Training rather than controls.

1. We need to train people to become partners and parents just as we train engineers, doctors, and lawyers.
2. On the job training -- no artificial approach will do.
3. What kind of training?
   a. Training for crisis alleviation.
   b. Training for prevention.
   c. Training for correction of distortions and dysfunctions.
   d. Training for improvement of normality -- raise the baseline.

D. Who shall train trainers?

1. Who will they be?
2. What should they learn?
3. How should they practice?
4. Where should they practice?

E. How can we train trainers?

1. We do not have structures
   a. for referral
   b. for delivery.
2. We do not have programs.
3. We do not have incentives,
   a. certification
   b. licensing
   c. credentials
   d. profession

F. What the White House Conference can do for us:

1. Improve structures.

2. Improve programs.

3. Improve incentives.

G. Conclusion.

At the present time two major family training programs (one at the University of Georgia and one at Georgia State University) in the state are unable to provide for these needs. New avenues will need exploration and support.

References

Robinson, R. Marriage guidelines issued by Bishop. The Chattanooga Times, 1979, Nov. 25, pp. 1-2.